

John M. Bracken Hotel
100-104 Anderson Street
Pittsburgh
Allegheny County
Pennsylvania

HABS No. PA-5443

HABS
PA
2-PITBU,
58-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
MID-ATLANTIC REGION, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
PHILADELPHIA, PENNSYLVANIA 19106

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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

JOHN M. BRACKEN HOTEL HABS NO. PA-5443

Location: 100-104 Anderson Street (Northeast corner
of Anderson Street and River Avenue),
Pittsburgh, Allegheny County, Pennsylvania.

USGS Pittsburgh West Quadrangle, Universal
Transverse Mercator Coordinates:
17.584770.4477760

Present Owner: Urban Redevelopment Authority of Pittsburgh

Present Occupant: Vacant

Present Use: Vacant

Significance: The Bracken Hotel, built in 1892, is one of
the last remnants in this part of what was
once the City of Allegheny, annexed to
Pittsburgh in 1907. The Hotel, built near
the Pittsburgh and Western Freight and
Passenger Stations, was apparently intended
to serve the railroad industry, which became
the mainstay of commerce in Allegheny in the
1880's and 1890's following the decline of
the cotton textile industry.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of Erection:

1892 (Datestone)

2. Architect:

Not known

3. Original and Subsequent Owners:

References to the Chain of Title to the land upon which the structure stands are in the office of the Recorder of Deeds, County Office Building, Ross Street, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

1889 Deed, September 17, 1889, recorded in Volume 656, p. 396.

Abraham Wakefield to Mrs. Mary C. Bracken
(Mrs. Bracken died April 23, 1943 and left the property to her daughter, Mary Bracken Johnson).

1944 Deed, September 15, 1944, recorded in Volume 2811, p. 544.

Mary Bracken Johnson to Joseph Viktoravice and Alice Viktoravice.

1945 Deed, November 28, 1945, recorded in Volume 2846, p. 645.

Joseph Viktoravice and Alice Viktoravice, 1/2 interest to A. Zdankus and Mary Zdankus.
(Anthony (A.) Zdankus died February 15, 1950, leaving his share to his widow, Mary.)

1956 Deed, February 9, 1956, recorded in Volume 3568, p. 125.

Mary Zdankus and Joseph Viktoravice and Alice Viktoravice to Michael D. Fabry and Gertrude S. Fabry.

1957 Deed, August 2, 1957, recorded in Volume 3617,
p. 339.

Michael D. Fabry and Gertrude S. Fabry to
Theodore R. Opacic and Milan E. Vooletich.

1959 Deed, June 26, 1959, recorded in Volume 3799,
p. 181.

Milan E. Vooletich and Zora Vooletich, 1/2
interest to Rade Opacic.

1960 Deed, November 30, 1960, recorded in Volume
3891, p. 165.

Theodore R. Opacic and JoAnne Opacic, 1/2
interest to Rade Opacic.

Deed, December 7, 1960, recorded in Volume
3909, p. 9.

Rade Opacic and Stoja Opacic to themselves.
(Mr. Opacic died January 16, 1970, leaving his
share to his widow, Stoja.)

1977 Deed, August 9, 1977, recorded in Volume 5828,
p. 191.

Stoja Opacic to Theodore Opacic and Joanne
Opacic.

1983 Deed, November 14, 1983, recorded in Volume
6767, p. 104.

Theodore R. Opacic and Joanne Opacic to Nick G.
Chirigos.

4. Builder, Contractor, Suppliers:

Not known

5. Original Plans and Construction:

The Hotel was apparently built as an L-shape and
featured striped awnings on all windows and doors.
The triangular cast iron parapets at either end of
the Anderson Street (west) facade were topped by
finials.

6. Alterations and Additions:

Physical evidence shows the addition of the north-east corner to fill in the L. Pasted overlays over the hotel in the Sanborn Insurance maps support this.

There also appears to have been some reinforcing done to support the wall between the front (southernmost) and middle rooms on the first and second floors, probably a result of the poor vertical alignment of the third floor, where the bearing wall does not line up with the ones below it. (Date Unknown.)

B. Historical Context:

This hotel was built in what was once Allegheny City, at a time when the city was undergoing dramatic changes. The railroad, accommodating transportation of passengers and freight, as well as freight storage, replaced cotton mills as the mainstay of commerce. The hotel was built next to new Pittsburgh and Western Freight and Passenger Stations, (once located directly across the street on the northwest corner of River Avenue and Isabella Street), an ideal location for the operation of a hotel and it is probable that it was built to serve railroad travelers. One other hotel, Elbourne, is no longer extant, 108 Gene Robinson.

Although an 1874 map shows building coverage on the Bracken Hotel site, the property was sold to Mrs. Mary C. Bracken in 1889 with no structure mentioned in the deed. We believe that she built the hotel, perhaps in memory of her husband. By 1903, the neighborhood had developed into a modest, but handsome mix of residential and commercial row buildings with Anderson Street as the major commercial thoroughfare. The neighborhood was annexed, with the rest of Allegheny City, to Pittsburgh in 1907. The mid-twentieth century brought decline and eventual demolition of these structures, leaving the Bracken Hotel as the lone survivor.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural Character:

The existing building is a three story brick construction with six bays on Anderson and 3 bays along the sides. The windows are 1 over 1 with stone lintels.

2. Condition of Fabric:

The brick is in fair condition, but all windows and doors are boarded up. At the north end, a portion of the brick wall and all of the chimney have fallen away. The interior finishes are nearly obliterated due to a fire on the first floor and severely deteriorated on the second and third floors. Obvious structural problems have left the building out of plumb.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall Dimensions:

The building is roughly rectangular, measuring 62'6" (6 bays) across the Anderson Street (west) front, 28'9" (3 bays) along the River Avenue (south) end, 40' and 21' along the east side, and 31'8" along the north end. It is 3 stories with a parapet concealing the roof.

2. Foundations:

Stone, with a stone water table.

3. Walls:

Smooth brick laid in common bond with stone lintels and sills.

4. Structural Systems, Framing:

Timber/brick.

5. Porches, Stoops, Balconies, Bulkheads:

Concrete steps lead to Anderson Street door.

6. Chimneys:

Four brick chimneys, three of which open to fireplaces on the second and third floor.

7. Openings:

a. Doorways and Doors:

All radically altered. A 1903 view shows doors and windows, all full height and with matching awnings, which appear to be aligned with the bays of the uppers floors. The first floor now has two

doorways on Anderson Street and one on River Avenue, all boarded up, as well as broad window openings, their sills several feet off the ground, all filled in with glass block.

b. Windows and Shutters:

Double hung sash (1/1) on second and third floors. First floor window openings have all been changed and in-filled with glass block.

8. Roof:

a. Shape, Covering:

Flat.

b. Cornice, Eaves:

The corbelled brick cornice serves as a base for three cast iron parapets. The center, curved parapet is slightly raised above the others and displays the date of the hotel (1892). The outer two parapets are triangular and display floral-like motifs. Four large finials separate and accent the ends of each parapet. A name plate with "John M. Bracken" is located on the facade below the center parapet.

c. Dormers, Cupolas, Towers:

None.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor Plans:

The plan of the building reflects its hotel use. The first floor, a large open space, might have been public or retail space. The upper floors are divided into four to six rooms for guests. (See attached plans.)

2. Stairways:

One at the north end is inaccessible and was filled in to accommodate two bathrooms on the first floor.

The main stair at the southeast corner has turned spindles to and on the second floor, and square spindles to and on the third floor.

3. Flooring:

Wide pine boards over 2-7/8" x 13-1/4" joists, 16" on center average.

4. Wall and Ceiling Finish:

All of the walls are plaster, with the exception of some wood wainscot at varied heights in the two northeast corner rooms on the second floor. (The wainscoted rooms appear to have been service oriented; they contain the dumbwaiter and storage closets.) Wallpaper is peeling from most ceiling and wall surfaces.

5. Openings:

a. Doorways and Doors:

Door heights are 6'11-1/2" without transoms and 8'6-1/2" with transoms, including Federal-style trim, which is ridged casing with bull's eye corner blocks and plinth bases. Doors, where they survive, are panelled, 2/2. A few decorative hinges with scrolling survive. The knobs are glass or metal, with surface-mounted lock-boxes.

b. Windows:

Window heights are 8'8", including the trim, which is again Federal-style 5" width ridged casing with bull's eye corner blocks and plinth bases. The glass openings measure 5'7" in height, with recessed panels below.

6. Decorative Features and Trim:

Wood trim, described above, surrounds all doors and windows. A 10" baseboard is present everywhere except in rooms with wainscot, but no crown mold is present. The fireplaces, one in each of the three rooms along the western side on the second and third floors (six total), are framed by decorative metal surrounds and wood mantels; all survive except the wood mantel in the southernmost second floor room.

The middle room on the second floor east side has a dumbwaiter with double paneled doors and a shelf on brackets below; a four-shelf cabinet behind a standard door is to its right. The northernmost room on the second floor has a similar cabinet. We speculate that these were service rooms, providing food delivery and linen storage.

7. Hardware:

None survive on the windows; the doors, where surviving, have glass or metal knobs and surface-mounted lockboxes.

8. Mechanical Equipment:

a. Heating, air conditioning, ventilation:
None survives.

b. Lighting:

A few remnants survive of gas service next to doors and fireplaces. The pipes are evident, but no fixtures are present. More recent electrical fixtures are simple metal bulb sockets.

D. Site:

1. General Setting and Orientation:

The building sets on a corner at the northern end of a bridge over the Allegheny River which connects the North Side with downtown Pittsburgh. A concrete sidewalk runs along the west and south sides, a newer brick building abuts to the east, and a vacant lot sets to the north. The rest of a streetscape of 3 - 3 1/2 story brick facades and a brick street with trolley tracks, shown in a 1903 photograph, is now gone.

2. Historic Landscape Design:

A 1903 photograph shows a 15' deciduous tree at the corner of Anderson Street and River Avenue. No other landscape features appear to have been present.

3. Outbuildings:

None.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. Architectural Drawings:

None available.

B. Historic Views:

1. 1903 photograph of Anderson Street, looking south.
No. 155 of U. S. Engineer Office in Collection of
Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh, File Number P-3191.

C. Interviews:

None.

D. Bibliography:

1. Primary and unpublished sources:

Deed Books, Recorder of Deeds, Allegheny County.

2. Secondary and published sources:

City of Pittsburgh Department of City Planning.
"History of Land Use, North Shore Redevelopment
Area, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania". Pittsburgh:
City of Pittsburgh Department of City Planning,
1986.

Davis, Christine E. and Verna L. Cowin. "Archaeo-
logical Survey and Land-Use History of the North
Shore Redevelopment Area, Pittsburgh, Penn-
sylvania." Pittsburgh: The Carnegie for the
Department of City Planning and The Urban Rede-
velopment Authority, 1988.

Hopkins, G. M. & Company.

1872 Atlas of the Cities of Pittsburgh,
Allegheny, and the Adjoining Boroughs.
Philadelphia: G. M. Hopkins and Company,
1872.

1882 Atlas of the Cities of Pittsburgh and
Allegheny, from the Official Records,
Private Plans, and Actual Surveys.
Philadelphia: G. M. Hopkins and Company,
1882.

1886 Atlas of the Vicinity of Pittsburgh and Allegheny, from Official Records, Private Plans, and Actual Surveys. Philadelphia: G. M. Hopkins and Company, 1886.

1890-91 Atlas of the City of Allegheny, from Official Records, Private Plans, and Actual Surveys. Philadelphia: G. M. Hopkins and Company, 1890-91.

1907 Real Estate Plat Book of the City of Allegheny. Philadelphia: G. M. Hopkins and Company, 1907.

Parke, J.E. Recollections of Seventy Years, and Historical Gleanings of Allegheny, Pennsylvania. Boston: Avery and Co., 1886.

Sanborn Map Company. Insurance Maps of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, 1926.

E. Likely Sources Not Yet Investigated:

Building permit records, City of Pittsburgh.

Pittsburgh and Western Railroad records, if any.

F. Supplemental Material:

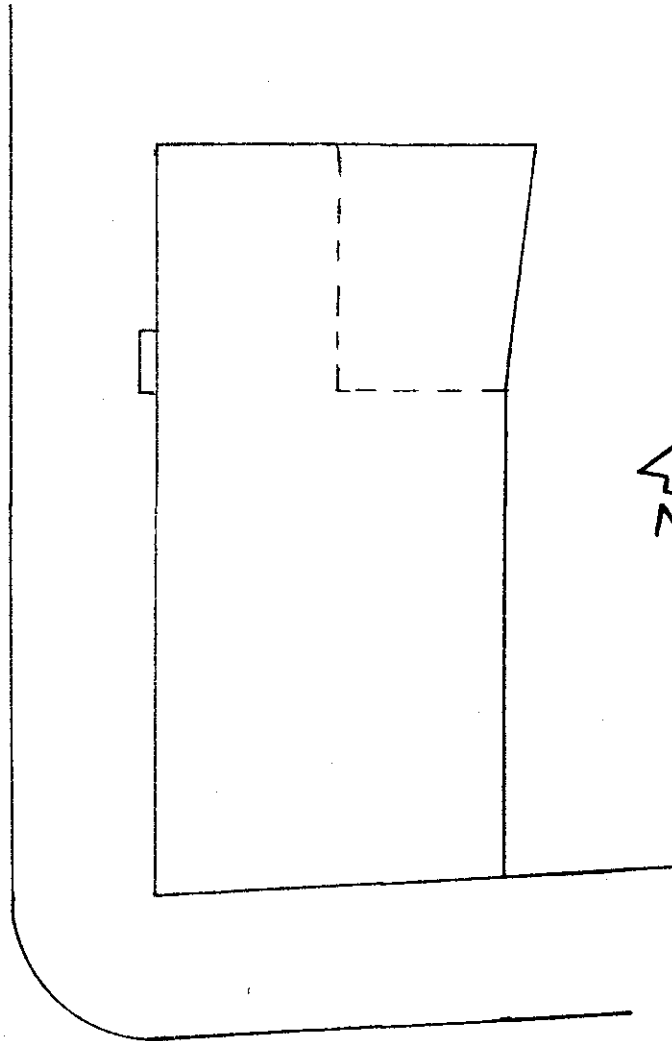
None.

PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

In anticipation of clearing land for a mid-rise housing complex, the Urban Redevelopment Authority (URA) of Pittsburgh plans demolition of the Bracken Hotel. The URA retained Landmarks Design Associates to document the Hotel, which was done on August 22, 1989.

Prepared by: Eliza Smith Brown
Title: Director of Marketing
Affiliation: Landmarks Design Associates
Date: September 1, 1989

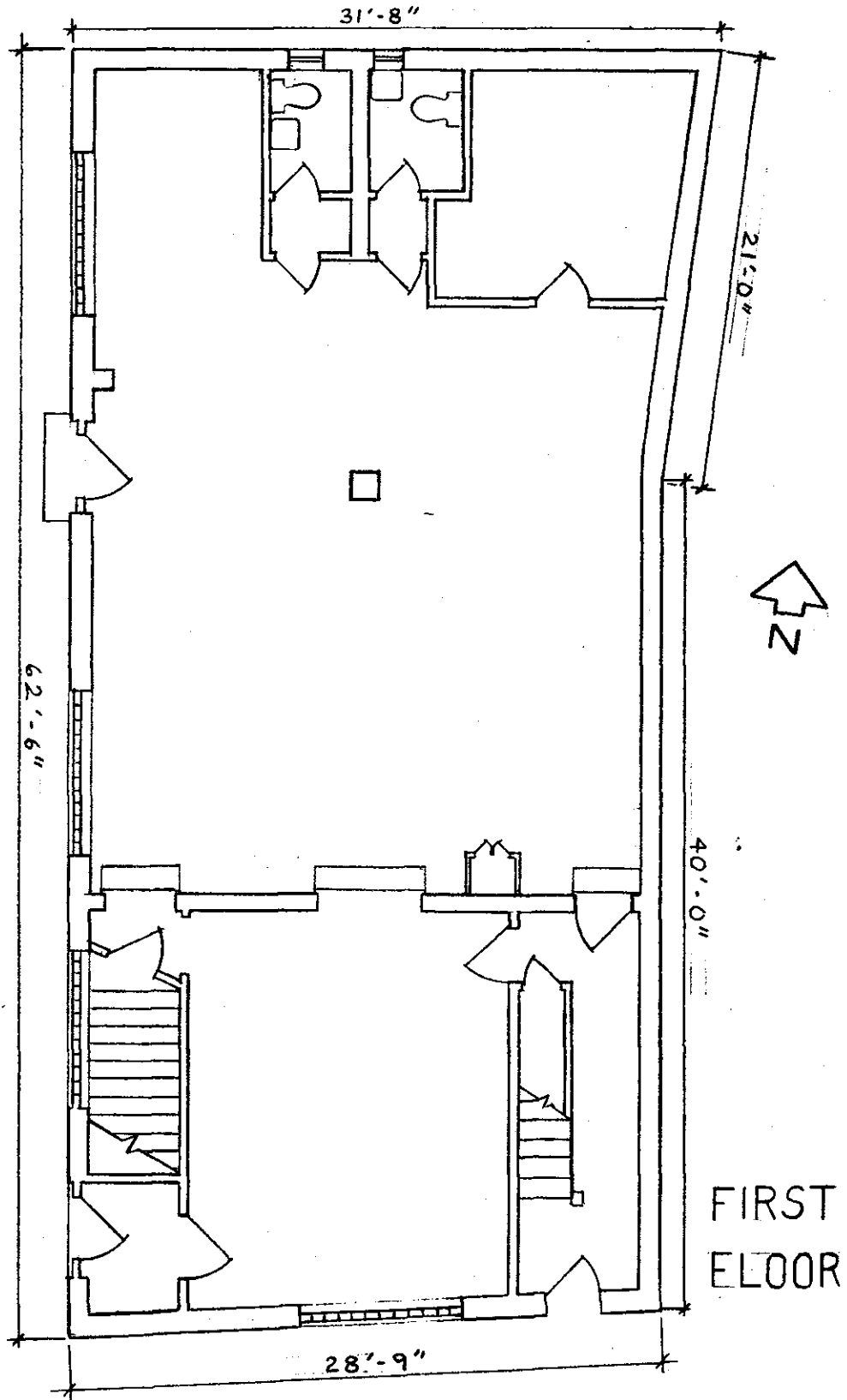
ANDERSON STREET



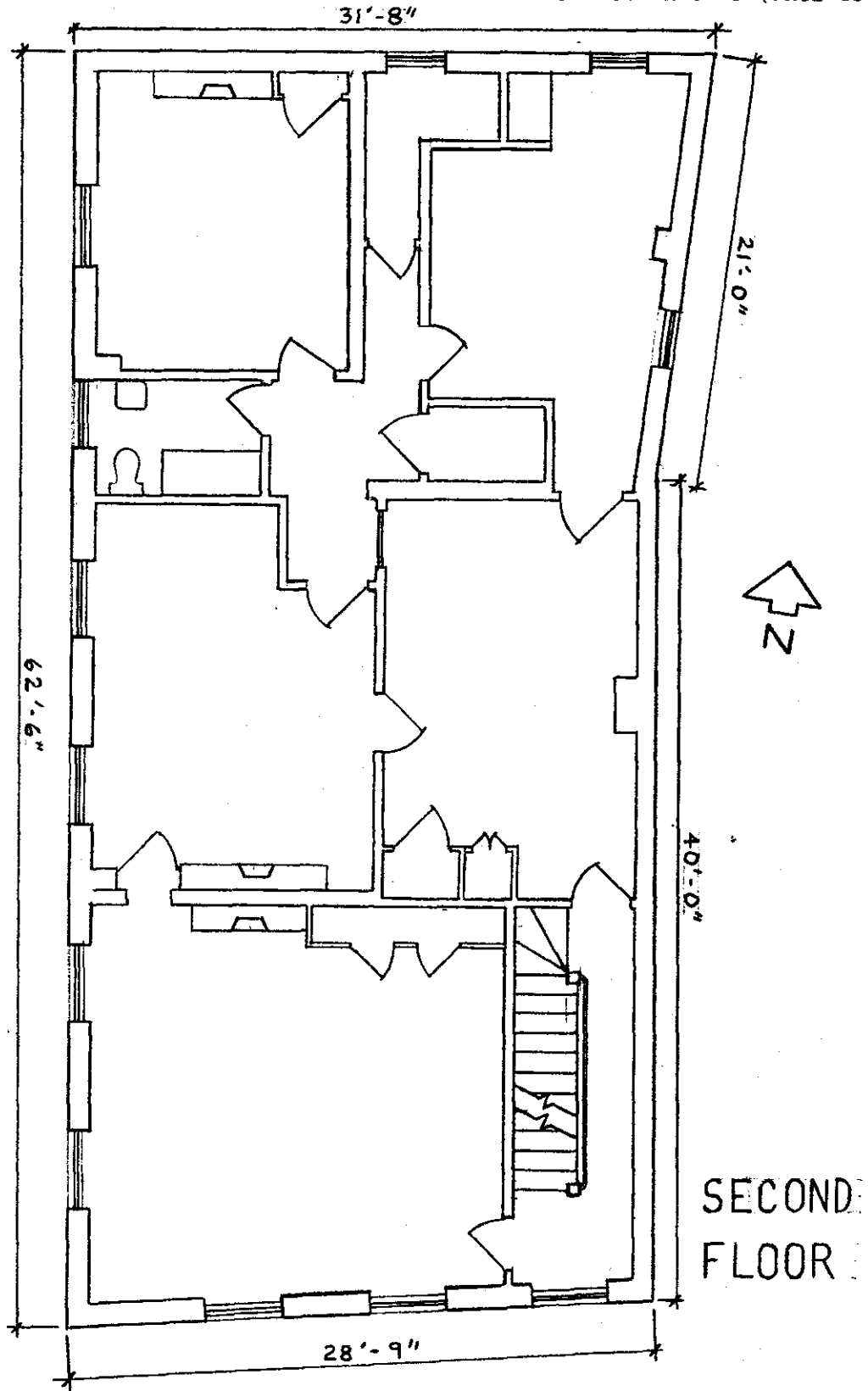
RIVER AVENUE

SITE
PLAN

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